

AFTER HITLER

Recivilizing Germans, 1945–1995 Konrad H. Jarausch

Translated by

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PREFACE

Americans harbor somewhat ambivalent feelings about Germany. On the one hand, many observers remain skeptical: This is true especially of the individuals whose families suffered during World War II, who hold deep-seated resentments against the country. Seeing Nazi crimes as the embodiment of ultimate evil, many intellectuals remain deeply suspicious of the claim that the country of the perpetrators may have reformed. Even prominent journalists such as Jane Kramer of the *New Yorker* and Mark Fischer of the *Washington Post* are more interested in the dark past than in the changes that followed. On the other hand, other commentators are more charitable: Most soldiers and businessmen who have lived in the Federal Republic fondly remember a friendly and hard-working people that seem to be much like their own. For instance, while fighting in the Vietnam jungle, many GIs dreamed about being stationed “back home in Germany.” More recently, President George W. Bush somewhat misleadingly cited the transformation of the Germans after World War II as justification for his democratic crusade abroad.

These contradictory evaluations rest on a disconnect between the prevalence of negative Nazi memories and a lack of appreciation for the positive transformation during the last half century. For instance, in his indictment of “eliminary anti-Semitism,” Daniel J. Goldhagen paints a vivid picture of the complicity of ordinary Germans but suggests without further explanation that somehow the country miraculously transformed after 1945. Compared to the academic attention devoted to exploring Hitler’s seizure of power and the effort to educate the public about the crimes of the Holocaust, the difficult process by which the Germans distanced themselves from nationalism and rejoined the international community thereafter remains underexplored. Almost any volume

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Choosing Unification

During the summer of 1989 the democratic awakening in Eastern Europe posed a fundamental challenge to the normality of the continent's division and, as a result, to the separation of the German states. The efforts of Mikhail Gorbachev and George H. Bush toward détente had softened the two fronts to the point that, for the first time in decades, nuclear disarmament and even the lifting of the iron curtain began to be conceivable. Soviet toleration of the independent trade union, Solidarity, in Poland and the commemoration movement for the 1956 uprising in Hungary made it clear that the Brezhnev doctrine had been effectively revoked, a drastic change that promised greater freedom for internal reforms among the satellite states. Finally, Bonn's Eastern policy had engendered sufficient trust in the Soviet bloc to reduce traditional fears of German revanchism. These developments, which Kohl and Gorbachev discussed during the latter's visit in Bonn, also infused new life into the question of reunification, which had "long lain dormant in the shadow of 'political realities.'" How would the Germans, how would their neighbors, react to these new opportunities?³⁴

The first response was an intense controversy that revealed the extent to which everyone had become accustomed to the division. In June, a federal government spokesman predicted "Honecker's remaining in office beyond 1990," while the SED head hoped that "the development of good-neighborly relations" would continue. The Young Socialists also advocated "transnational cooperation" rather than the pursuit of the illusion of unity, while left intellectuals such as Gerhard Zwerenz criticized the concept of "reunification" as "an empty nationalist phrase, which does not even appear in the Basic Law."³⁵ By contrast, a growing number of commentators, including dramatist Rolf Hochhuth, believed that "the German clock has struck unity" and in light of the reforms in the Soviet Union predicted, like CDU politician Ottfried Hennig, that "the wall will fall." Foreign observers, such as the French historian Joseph Rovin and the former Italian ambassador Luigi Ferraris, also began to ponder "the possibility of the reunification of the continent which had been split since 1945." Although the Federal Republic was not pursuing a "policy of destabilization," these differences in opinion made it clear that "people were once again discussing the German question."³⁶

The end of stability signaled by the mass exodus from the GDR threw the Bonn government into a quandary over the future of its Germany policy. The East Germans' elemental urge to emigrate plunged the "policy of small steps" into a crisis, because the normal exchange of economic help for humanitarian concessions could no longer master the new dimension of the problem. Should operative policy, even in this situation, "simply stay its course" and continue the tested cooperation with the SED, or was the wave of emigration a sign of such a "widespread dissatisfaction" as to necessitate a policy change, pushing

for the democratic self-determination of the GDR population?³⁷ While leftist politicians like Gerhard Schröder continued to reject reunification as an "unsuitable term," conservatives, such as the journalist Karl Friedrich Fromme, now demanded an active policy aimed at unification. After much discussion, Chancellor Kohl and opposition leader Hans-Jochen Vogel finally agreed "to offer [the GDR] broadly conceived cooperation, were it to introduce political and economic reforms." Having underestimated the opposition in the GDR, West German politicians initially responded by intensifying their well-tested Eastern policy.³⁸

Ultimately "the precipitous development in East Berlin" forced a fundamental rethinking of options, which shattered the normality of the division. The rapid growth of the Leipzig demonstrations and their spread to other cities demanded greater adherence to human rights, while Honecker's fall signaled a generational transfer of power within the ossified SED leadership. The decisive event, however, was the partly planned and partly accidental opening of the Berlin wall on November 9 because it made possible a spontaneous unification from below in the divided Berlin: "The Germans are celebrating their reunion," the media proclaimed. Bonn's policy supported this democratic awakening with further calls for reform, contacts with the newly emerging opposition groups, and demands for "free elections in the GDR" as a condition for an "entirely new dimension of economic assistance."³⁹ To be sure, the SED continued to insist that reunification "was not on the agenda," and opponents called for concerted action "against unification." But in international commentaries "the sleeping lioness of unity" raised her head, and the West German populace began to consider the return of political unity not only desirable but also suddenly possible.⁴⁰

Only in late November did Helmut Kohl risk the crucial step of declaring unification the goal "of operative daily policy" in his "Ten Point Plan." Even if misunderstood hints by Soviet diplomat Nikolai Portugalow triggered the idea, it was Horst Teltschik who suggested that the chancellor might reclaim the leadership of public opinion with a daring initiative. The text itself was worked out in the close confines of the chancellery without input from Foreign Minister Genscher or consultation of Western allies so as not to dilute it.⁴¹ On its face, the plan contained little more than an evolution of previous policy, since in addition to immediate aid it began with the continuation of "cooperation with the GDR." Going somewhat further, it made the expansion of assistance contingent on the condition that "a change of the political and economic system of the GDR [should] be bindingly resolved and irreversibly set in motion." More explosive yet was the reference to Hans Modrow's suggestion of a treaty community that would be expanded by "confederative structures between two states in Germany" with the clear goal of creating a "federal state order." Despite concluding allusions to European integration and the CSCE, this reference was the real provocation that set in motion the process of reunification.⁴²

Not surprisingly, the reaction to Kohl's unexpected initiative was rather divided. Conservative circles were overjoyed, since they believed that "we have earned our unity." Even the SPD brought itself to agree, largely because the elder statesman Willy Brandt insisted that "what belongs together is growing together," though the Saarland populist Oskar Lafontaine remained skeptical. In contrast, the Greens saw "no reason to deviate from our position." West German intellectuals inveighed "against the sweaty arrogance from Oggersheim," and Berlin leftists demonstrated in "unity against the Kohl plantation."⁴³ Likewise, Germany's allies and neighbors were hardly enthused by the chancellor's coup, since they felt slighted by not being consulted and had major substantive reservations. U.S. President George Bush proved the most amenable to the plan, but on the condition that Germany remain in NATO. French President François Mitterrand, however, had ambivalent feelings toward a potential increase in German power, while British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher flatly rejected unification. Most distraught of all was Mikhail Gorbachev, who did not consider his policy of détente as permission for unity and thus gave Genscher a firm dressing down, replete with allusions to Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union some fifty years before.⁴⁴

Once again, the East German populace forced hesitant politicians to take further action with its open endorsement of unity. In the second half of November, the chants ringing forth from the Monday demonstrations in Leipzig began to change from "we are *the* people" to "we are *one* people," and even to "Germany, united Fatherland." While socialist intellectuals continued to hope for an independent "third way" that would reform the GDR, more and more opposition groups began to demand outright unification.⁴⁵ Recruited from conservative church circles, the Democratic Awakening Party was the first to call for the reconstitution of national unity, the SDP advocated "a democratic and unaligned Germany in a European house," and the citizens' rights group Democracy Now presented a step-by-step plan for a "mutual convergence" through political and social reforms enacted by both states. When a huge crowd of Dresden citizens triumphantly received Kohl just before Christmas with shouts of "Helmut, Helmut" and black-red-gold flags, the silent majority made the continuation of division untenable. The chancellor realized, "this regime is finished. Unity is coming!" With the wind clearly at its back, the federal government in Bonn decided to discontinue support for East German statehood and instead to push for unification.⁴⁶

The growing pressure for "unity from below" unleashed an intense domestic and international debate over the legitimacy of a German nation-state. Many foreign commentators, such as the editorial staff of the *New York Times*, feared that "this development is unavoidable," although "hardly anyone is for it." But most domestic observers saw the "merger of both states in Germany as the only way out of the economic, social, political, and moral crisis of the GDR."⁴⁷ In fact, both reactions were emotional, because the return of a German nation-state

touched on a dual taboo: On the one hand, the entire postwar order in Europe was based on the division of Germany; on the other hand, the identity of German intellectuals rested on a "postnational" self-understanding conditioned by the Holocaust.⁴⁸ As a result, in the winter of 1989–1990, the state chancelleries and various commentators searched frantically for past models that would yield somewhat to the aspirations for national unity without allowing the problematic pre-1945 nationalist state to return. In the process, positive and negative notions of normality played a key role, as their competing slogans determined the respective recommendations.

Fearing a "Fourth Reich," opponents of unification insisted on the continuation of the division since they considered multiple statehood the normal condition of the German past. The quasi-historical "arguments against reunification" were quite diverse: A German nation-state was immoral, because it had been discredited by Auschwitz; anti-Semitic, since racism still lingered; "reactionary and aggressive," because it rested on the borders of 1937; "utterly impossible," for it required the annexation of the GDR; and, finally, "illusory," because East German living standards could not be raised quickly to Western levels.⁴⁹ This negative and oversimplified memory shaped above all the feelings of the political and racial victims of National Socialism in Israel, the United States, the Soviet Union, and Poland, whose suffering had been inextricably tied to the name "Germany." But ironically, German intellectuals such as Günter Grass, in a kind of anti-Fascism after the fact, also wished to avoid a relapse into the horrors of the Third Reich and thus remained fixated on old fears.⁵⁰ In the long run, however, their refusal could not be maintained because it ignored the fundamental changes that had taken place during the generation and a half since 1945.

Searching for a "Third Way," reformist socialists, by contrast, favored the idea of a "treaty community" because it allowed the possibility of a "socialist alternative to the FRG." This solution, worked out by the chancellor's office in the form of a detailed draft treaty, rested on continued GDR independence that would be developed through closer ties in all areas of the economy and culture into a kind of dual state. The main supporters of this East German attempt to "develop a solidarity society" of their own came not only from the former SED, now reborn as the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), but also from elements within the citizens' movement of the Round Table, as well as Western radicals who refused to give up the project of democratizing socialism without a fight.⁵¹ Initially, Gorbachev also sought the renewal of the GDR through internal reforms, while some Western intellectuals and trade unionists preferred continuing the project of a "better Germany" to creating a united one. In the long run, however, the obvious failure of real existing socialism and the East German people's longing for unity pulled the rug out from under the project of establishing just a loose treaty community between a self-reforming East and an affluent West that would have to finance it.⁵²

The compromise of a "confederation" offered a more gradual progression toward unification since it accommodated the desire for unity without immediately ending the independence of the GDR. In many ways, it hearkened back to the "German Confederation" of the nineteenth century because it tried to make the incompatible compatible by aiming for greater community while simultaneously maintaining separate sovereignty. The SED had actually made this suggestion in the 1950s so as to avoid "free elections" and codify the "achievements of socialism" through legal equality during a potential merger. Plans for a confederation were propagated primarily by the PDS, the leftist currents in the SPD, and the Greens who had grudgingly accepted unity but did not want to see a complete fusion.⁵³ Several neighboring states also saw in such a solution the lesser, but still tolerable, evil. However, Modrow's loss of credibility that stemmed from the discovery of SED corruption, his further support of the Stasi, and the state bankruptcy rendered even a partial salvaging of dual statehood obsolete. After sharp debates, even the Soviet government realized the inevitable "necessity" of unification, making its concession public in early February during successive press conferences with Modrow and Kohl in Moscow.⁵⁴

Advocates of unity, by contrast, called for an "accession" to the Federal Republic according to the Basic Law, based on the precedent of the return of the Saarland in 1956. An orderly transition could be accomplished, either through a joint constitutional convention spelled out in article 146 or through a quick entry of the new states according to article 23, thereby avoiding a "long adventure" of transition. Arguments for this "given process" referred to the achievements of democratization, the reputation of the Basic Law as "the most peaceful and liberal political order," and the integration into Europe and the Western alliance system. As a nation within the recognized borders, a truncated German state would no longer represent an anomaly in the international community. Proponents of accession were primarily the governing parties, as well as the SPD, the Protestant churches that had helped maintain cohesion, and a growing majority of the East German population.⁵⁵ Equally important was the steady support of the American government and of dissidents from East Central Europe, because their encouragement reduced foreign resistance. The core problem of this alternative, however, was the clarification of controversial positions such as the recognition of the Eastern border with Poland, as well as the continuation of NATO membership.⁵⁶

By contrast, the final variant of creating a "European peace order" stressed the interdependence of German unity and European integration. Above all, Foreign Minister Genscher pointed out that the new Germany ought to be embedded into Europe so as to gain the approval of its neighbors through "full respect for existing treaties," the "inviolability of borders," and the "establishment of structures for cooperative security." But Chancellor Kohl also steadfastly supported Germany's "European responsibility with no ifs or buts," since he considered

national unity and European integration "not [as] competing, but rather as complementary mandates of the Basic law." The SPD, the Greens, and the skeptics of unity among the East German citizens' rights advocates supported this position as well.⁵⁷ Of course, Europeanization was also popular among the neighboring states because it permitted a still-hesitant Mitterrand to accept the inevitable under certain conditions and opened the door for East Central Europe's return to the West. Nonetheless, it remained highly controversial whether that alternative meant the abolition of the nation-state and neutralization within the CSCE or Germany's incorporation into the European Union.⁵⁸

Ultimately, the dispute over the "path to Germany" was not decided by an academic jury but by the population of the GDR in the first free elections of March 1990. The unexpected victory of the "Alliance for Germany," which received over 48 percent of the vote, as well as the disappointing results for the SPD, which came in at just under 22 percent, and the Liberals who received about 5 percent, resulted in a three-quarter majority in favor of unity. While the East German government of Lothar de Mazière, which comprised this coalition, wanted to "set its own priorities," it proved to be a more willing partner in the negotiations with Bonn than its predecessor, which had been dominated by the PDS.⁵⁹ The influence of this clear "affirmation of unity" on the form and pace of the process was undeniable: On the one hand, the result was a signal to hesitant intellectuals, who remained skeptical of unity because of a misunderstood lesson of history, as well as those West Germans who feared that it might bring "material disadvantages."⁶⁰ On the other hand, the clear mandate strengthened the hand of those powers such as the United States who advocated "quick unification" and insisted on membership in NATO. Thereafter the task would be "to shape this unity in appropriate steps."⁶¹

For the international community the chief challenge was realizing the German right to self-determination without, however, destabilizing Europe in the process. Among the affected countries, the implementation of this desire unleashed many anxieties since they feared that "Pandora's box is once again open." As a result of numerous closed-door conversations, American, Russian, and German statesmen agreed on "two-plus-four negotiations" to accommodate the wishes of both German states while at the same time respecting the residual rights of the victors of the Second World War.⁶² Despite the protests of the smaller neighbors who felt ignored, this formula proved advantageous because both German states were for the most part able to agree, in spite of the differences between the neutralism of Markus Meckel and the multilateralism of Hans-Dietrich Genscher. At the same time, strong American support for unity overcame the resentment of Margaret Thatcher, derived largely from the loss of her special status in the White House, and the wavering attitude of François Mitterrand. The key role, however, fell to Mikhail Gorbachev, since unification meant that the Soviet Union had to give up its East German satellite.⁶³

The result of the dramatic negotiations was neither a neutral confederation nor a European peace order but an expanded Federal Republic that remained firmly anchored in the West.⁶⁴ First, the Two-Plus-Four Treaty of September 12, 1990, established that "the unified Germany will encompass the territories of the FRG, GDR, and all of Berlin." This statement in effect recognized the Oder-Neisse line as the eastern border with Poland, even if agreement was difficult for those who had been expelled in 1945.⁶⁵ Second, it reaffirmed Bonn's peace policy such as the "renunciation of the production, possession, and power to determine the use of ABC weapons." This also meant a drastic reduction in the size of the Bundeswehr to 370,000 soldiers following the integration of the Eastern NVA, thereby preventing any possibility of new aggression. Third, the Soviet Union promised to withdraw its troops from East Germany by 1994, as long as Bonn would bear the costs and only conventional forces would be stationed there. The fourth, and for Moscow the most difficult concession, was that Germany would retain the right to choose its alliances and thus maintain its membership in NATO as a whole. Fifth, the victorious powers dissolved "their rights and responsibilities," returning to unified Germany "full sovereignty over its internal and external affairs." The conclusion of the treaty was "a historical hour for Europe and a fortunate hour for the Germans."⁶⁶

At the same time, the domestic aspects of unification had to be organized, which in effect amounted to the transfer of the Western system to the new states. Although many felt "steamrolled" by its pace, the economy cried out for "rapid unification" to prevent the bankrupt GDR from "bleeding dry" through the "exodus of hundreds of thousands." By proposing an "economic and currency union," which recalled the Zollverein of the nineteenth century, Chancellor Kohl wanted to give East Germans a "perspective for the future, that is, courage and confidence to stay." In order to overcome the "intensifying crisis," the Federal Republic offered "its strongest economic asset, the D-Mark."⁶⁷ Rather than "growing together as slowly as possible," this offer called for an abrupt, fundamental change of systems by "creating the legal preconditions for the introduction of the market economy." Since in setting the exchange rate the interests of the East and West Germans collided with one another, a compromise of 1:1.5 was finally worked out. The financial conversion, which required sums reaching into the billions, would be facilitated through a fund for German unity on the capital market. Ignoring the warnings of leftist Cassandras, the signing of the State Treaty was a "decisive step toward unity," because the East Germans "had faith in an economic rebound."⁶⁸

The unification treaty was thus a necessary attempt to find a legal form for the GDR's integration into the Federal Republic because most East Germans insisted on adopting the Western model.⁶⁹ Though some wished to modify the Basic Law by inserting a "right to work," both governments preferred accession on the basis of article 23 because of the "uncertainties" of a lengthy constitu-

tional discussion according to article 146.⁷⁰ Lothar de Maizière's intention to bring about unity "as quickly as possible and as orderly as necessary" failed due to the collapse of GDR finances, which rendered an "emergency annexation unavoidable." After a long "skirmish," the East German Parliament therefore set the date for unification as October 3, 1990.⁷¹ The content of the voluminous treaty tried to regulate the chaos of the transition as much as possible. The easiest step was the political incorporation, which was accomplished through the reestablishment of the five Eastern states that had existed until 1952. More difficult was the recognition of Eastern diplomas and acceptance into the Western benefits system without having paid anything into it. The most controversial aspects proved to be determination of property rights, the legality of abortion, and access to the files of the Stasi, which had kept detailed records on millions of citizens. To cope with all these difficulties, Federal President Richard von Weizsäcker exhorted: "Accept each other."⁷²

The unification celebration on October 3, 1990, symbolized the transition "from normalization to normality"—from management of division to restoration of unity. A Swiss reporter described the festive scene: "Amid the exultation of tens of thousands . . . a huge black, red, and gold flag has been hoisted . . . in front of the Reichstag in Berlin at midnight as a sign that the entrance of the GDR into the FRG has been completed." On the rostrum Chancellor Kohl and Premier de Maizière, as well as other dignitaries, listened to the ringing of the freedom bell from the Schönberg town hall and sang the national anthem, intoned by a choir. "A brief moment of emotion" passed, with the "indefinable feeling of having witnessed a historic occasion." Champagne corks popped, fireworks lit up the evening sky, and "a cheerful festive mood" permeated the air. The celebration was deliberately unostentatious, so as not to produce any "patriotic ardor" that might evoke bad memories. By demonstrating the continued existence of its civility, the unified Federal Republic wanted to soothe the fears of both domestic and foreign skeptics who persisted in the opinion "never again Germany!"⁷³

Uncertainties of Normality

The elemental joy over the unexpected unity soon gave way to uncertainty about the consequences of returning to normality. To the question posed by the SPD politician Klaus von Dohnanyi in the summer of 1991, is "Germany—a normal country?" many intellectuals emphatically responded: "After Auschwitz there can never be political normality for Germany." For commentators such as Kurt Sontheimer who were sensitive to tradition, the return to the nation-state was "a miracle of history," which, as the neoconservative Rainer Zitelmann hoped, would put an end to the agonizing discussion of the past and inspire a more